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Senate May Expedite Relief For Intelligence Operations

Associated Press

Senate leaders reportedly have agreed to give priority to a bill easing restrictions on U.S. intelligence operations, partly in response to developments in Iran and Afghanistan.

Sen. Walter D. Huddleston (D-Ky.), chairman of the Senate intelligence subcommittee working on the bill, said yesterday he hopes to win Senate approval in as little as two months.

Huddleston said Senate Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D-W. Va.) agreed Thursday to give the bill priority for Senate action this year.

Huddleston said the bill would give U.S. intelligence agencies "flexibility" to begin operations to counter the Soviet military expansion into Afghanistan and the hostage situation in Iran.

The senator would not say if the intelligence agencies have specific covert operations ready to counter either of those situations.

He said he has been working on the bill with aides to President Carter's national security affairs adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski.

The bill in establishing a new charter for U.S. intelligence operations, would revise Congress' requirement

since 1974 that all clandestine operations be reported to eight congressional committees.

Huddleston said the bill would require that the operations be reported only to the Senate and House intelligence committees.

Intelligence officials say the 1974 reporting law makes clandestine operations abroad too risky, because leaks are too likely when so many Congress members and staff know about the operations.

Aides to House leaders and to the House Intelligence Committee said no plans have been made so far to expedite action on the bill in the House.

And Warren Nelson, an aide to Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.), chairman of the House intelligence subcommittee, which gets reports on clandestine operations, said he doubts a change in reporting is needed, because the intelligence agencies have continued covert operations anyway.

"They have been doing things—and reporting them to Congress—and nothing's leaked out," Nelson said. Nelson said he had not consulted Aspin and was speaking for himself.